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SUBJECT: SARKOZY'S SECURITY ADVISOR DISCUSSES RECENT UNREST, TERRORISM

REF: 11/18/2005 PARIS POINTS

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary: Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's security advisor, a 20-year plus veteran of the French National Police, said the recent unrest had taken the security establishment by surprise, but that the massive yet moderate response of the police prevented a major crisis of public order. Although he said the unrest had no direct link to Islamic fundamentalism or terrorism, the security advisor, Jean-Marc Berlioz, said that the GOF separately had stepped up its surveillance and intelligence gathering presence in mosques, prayer halls, halal butchers, North African tea cafes, and prisons. End summary.

RECENT UNREST

12. (C) Inspector General of the National Police Jean-Marc Berlioz told Poloff November 28 that many factors contributed to the recent social unrest in Paris' suburbs and across France, but that in general, integration and socio-economic problems were the root causes. These issues were familiar to the GOF, said Berlioz, although this specific unrest did come as a surprise. He confirmed that orders had been given to the more than 11,000 police dealing with the unrest not to use lethal force, even if they were under attack. Berlioz praised the restraint of the police. Cognizant of the need to show moderation and firmness, police officials frequently rotated and rested the forces on the street. Still, Berlioz said "we were lucky" in that one shot by a policeman could have provoked an aggravation of the unrest. Despite the fact that more than 250 police were wounded, some very seriously, the police exclusively used nonlethal force, said Berlioz. In doing this, he said the police gave politicians room to maneuver and respond.

13. (C) Police officials were also aware, said Berlioz, of the need to demonstrate absolute control of the situation, not only in order to dampen the violence but also to prevent the emergence of vigilante groups. A massive police presence was the primary way to demonstrate this control, said Berlioz. When asked why a major city like Marseilles was spared the unrest, Berlioz replied saying that it was by far the best integrated of French cities. It was a port city, open to the world, and despite persistent poverty, opportunity existed there that did not in other cities.

GOF COUNTERTERRORISM

14. (C) The GOF's draft counterterrorism law was approved by the National Assembly last week, with approval by the Senate expected by the end of the year. Berlioz said political fighting about the law was almost nonexistent. All sides recognized that it was essential to reform certain aspects of France's fight against terrorism. Primary reforms, said Berlioz, include adding police capabilities to track internet, cell phone and flight information. In addition, in the aftermath of the June bombings in London, GOF officials realized that France needed to vastly upgrade its video surveillance of public areas. This necessitated changing French privacy legislation. Berlioz would not rule out additional legislation in coming months if the need arose.

15. (C) France has focused on improving its ability to target and trace potential terrorists, said Berlioz, and the draft legislation would help. In addition, French domestic intelligence - primarily the DST and RG (both under the control of the Ministry of Interior) - had stepped up its surveillance of mosques, prayer halls, halal butchers (who are seen as particularly linked to extremism), and North African tea/waterpipe cafes. Another primary focus for the GOF is the French prison system, which has served as a place to recruit petty criminals into terrorist networks. Berlioz said recent networks, including one linked to Iraq and another led by GSPC sympathizer Safe Bourrada, had begun in prison. Public measures to deal with this issue include recruiting moderate imams to minister to the prison

population. Other, covert, measures include greater human and technical surveillance of the prison population, said Berlioz.

16. (C) Despite these new measures, the GOF remains pessimistic regarding a possible terrorist attack, said Berlioz. As an example, he cited the use of suicide bombers in the London bombings. Security measures are essentially based on a potential attacker's fear of dying, said Berlioz. Take away that fear, and the person becomes nearly impossible to stop. For this reason, it was essential that France better develop its targeting and tracing capability. The idea of when, not if, a terrorist attack would occur has also spurred the GOF to work on increasing public awareness of terrorist threats, said Berlioz. Traditionally, French intelligence chiefs were never in the public eye. Interior Minister Sarkozy changed this, said Berlioz, and told them they needed to appear publicly and to give interviews, so that the French public would grow accustomed to their presence and the work of their agencies in dealing with the terrorist threat. The GOF was impressed by the British public's sangfroid during the July bombings, said Berlioz, and it wanted to ensure that the French public was equally prepared. (Note: As a demonstration of Sarkozy's decision, in recent days Pascal Mailhos, the head of the RG, and Pierre de Bousquet, the head of the DST, have given extensive press interviews on the threat of terrorism. They have cited, among other issues, the role of Iraq in global jihadism, the threat of Islamist recruitment in French prisons, and the threat posed by the GSPC terrorist group. End note)

17. (C) Berlioz added that Iraq has taken the place of Afghanistan and Chechnya as a focal point for global jihadism. One difference, said Berlioz, was that jihadists engaged in combat in Iraq generally do not return to their home countries. Those who went to Afghanistan were less likely to engage in combat, preferring to attend training camps before returning home. There was therefore a greater potential for Afghanistan veterans to form sleeper cells in their native countries, said Berlioz. (Note: Another difference noted by French C/T professionals is that the time between conversion to extremist thought and action has become extremely short, making it more difficult for police and intelligence services to uncover new cells formed to send jihadists to Iraq and/or to plan attacks on French soil. (reftel) End note.)

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Stapleton